

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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## VIXEN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," &c. &c.

### CHAPTER III. BORIE COMES OF AGE.

"BLESS my soul!" cried the squire; "it's a vixen, after all."

This is how Squire Tempest greeted the family doctor's announcement of his first baby's sex. He had been particularly anxious for a son to inherit the Abbey House estate, maintain the Abbey hounds, and in a general way sustain the pride and glory of the family name; and, behold! Providence had given him a daughter.

"The deuce is in it," ejaculated the squire; "to think that it should be a vixen!"

This is how Violet Tempest came by her curious pet name. Before she was short-coated, she had contrived to exhibit a very spirited, and even vixenish temper, and the family doctor, who loved a small joke, used to ask after Miss Vixen when he paid his professional visits. As she grew older, her tawny hair was not unlike a red fox's brush in its bright golden-brown hue, and her temper proved decidedly vixenish.

"I wish you wouldn't call Violet by that dreadful nickname, dear," Mrs. Tempest remonstrated mildly.

"My darling, it suits her to a nicety," replied the squire, and he took his own way in this, as in most things.

The earth rolled round, and the revolving years brought no second baby to the Abbey House. Every year made the squire fonder of his little golden-haired girl. He put her on a soft white ball of a pony as soon as she could sit up straight, and took her about the forest with a leading rein. No one else was allowed to teach Vixen to

ride. Young as she was, she soon learnt to do without the leading rein, and the soft little white pony was discarded as too tame. Before her eleventh birthday she rode to hounds, and saw the stag at bay on the wild heathery downs above the wooded valleys. She was a creature full of life, and courage, and generous impulses, and spontaneous leanings to all good thoughts; but she was a spoiled child, liked her own way, and had no idea of being guided by anybody else's will—unless it had been her father's, and he never thwarted her.

Him she adored with the fondest love that child ever gave to parent. A blind worshipping love, that saw in him the perfection of manhood, the beginning and end of earthly good. If anyone had dared to say in Vixen's hearing that her father could, by any possible combination of circumstances, do wrong, act unjustly, or ungenerously, it would have been better for that man to have come to handy-grips with a tiger-cat than with Violet Tempest. Her reverence for her father, and her belief in him, were boundless.

There never, perhaps, was a happier childhood than Violet's. She was daughter and heiress to one of the most popular men in that part of the country, and everybody loved her. She was not much given to visiting in a methodical way among the poor, and it had never entered into her young mind that it was her mission to teach older people the way to heaven; but if there was trouble in the village: a sick child, a husband in prison for rabbit-snaring, a dead baby, a little boy's pinafore set fire to: Vixen and her pony were always to the fore; and it was an axiom in the village that, where Miss Tempest did "take," it was very good for those she

took to. Violet never withdrew her hand when she had put it to the plough. If she made a promise, she always kept it. However long the sickness, however dire the poverty, Vixen's patience and benevolence lasted to the end.

The famous princess in the story, whose sleep was broken because there was a pea under her seven feather-beds, had scarcely a more untroubled life than Vixen. She had her own way in everything. She did exactly what she liked with her comfortable, middle-aged governess, Miss McCroke, learnt what she pleased, and left what she disliked unlearned. She had the prettiest ponies in Hampshire to ride, the prettiest dresses to wear. Her mother was not a woman to bestow mental culture upon her only child, but she racked her small brain to devise becoming costumes for Violet. The coloured stockings which harmonised best with each particular gown, the neat little buckled shoes, the fascinating Hessian boots—nothing was too beautiful or too costly for Violet. She was the one thing her parents possessed in the world, and they lavished much love upon her; but it never occurred to Mr. and Mrs. Tempest, as it had occurred to the Duchess of Dovedale—to make their daughter a paragon.

In this perpetual sunshine Violet grew up, fair as most things are that grow in the sunshine. She loved her father with all her heart, and mind, and soul; she loved her mother with a lesser love; she had a tolerant affection for Miss McCroke; she loved her ponies, and the dog Argus; she loved the hounds in the kennels; she loved every honest familiar face of nurse, servant, and stable-man, gardener, keeper, and huntsman, that had looked upon her with friendly, admiring eyes, ever since she could remember.

Not to be loved and admired would have been the strangest thing to Violet. She would hardly have recognised herself in an unappreciative circle; if she could have heard Lady Mabel talking about her, it would have been like the sudden revelation of an unknown world—a world in which it was possible for people to dislike and misjudge her.

This is one of the disadvantages of being reared in a little heaven of domestic love. The outside world seems so hard, and bleak, and dreary afterwards, and the inhabitants thereof passing cruel.

Roderick Vawdrey Miss Tempest looked upon as her own particular property—a person whom she had the right to order

about as she pleased. Rorie had been her playfellow and companion in his holiday time for the last five years. All their tastes were in common. They had the same love for the brute creation, the same wild delight in rushing madly through the air on the backs of unreasoning animals; widely different in their tastes from Lady Mabel, who had once been run away with in a pony-carriage, and looked upon all horses as incipient murderers. They had the same love of nature, and the same indifference to books, and all the state and ceremony of life.

Vixen was "rising fifteen," as her father called it, and Rorie was just five years her senior. The squire saw them gay and happy together without one serious thought of what might come of it in the growth of years. That his Vixen could ever care for anyone but her "old dad," was a notion that had not yet found its way into the squire's brain. She seemed to him quite as much his own property, his own to do what he liked with, singly and simply attached to him, as his favourite horse or his favourite dog. So there were no shadowings forth in the paternal mind, as to any growth and development which the mutual affection of these two young people might take in the future.

It was very different with Lady Jane Vawdrey, who never saw her son and his cousin Mabel together without telling herself how exactly they were suited to each other, and what a nice thing it would be for the Briarwood and Ashbourne estates to be united by their marriage.

Rorie went back to college, and contrived to struggle through his next examinations with an avoidance of actual discredit; but when Christmas came he did not go back to the forest, though Violet had counted on his coming, and had thought that it would be good fun to have his help in the decorations for the little Gothic church in the valley—a pretty little new church, like a toy, which the squire had built and paid for, and endowed with a perpetual seventy pounds a year out of his own pocket. It would have been fun to see poor Rorie prick his clumsy fingers with the holly. Vixen laughed at his awkwardness in advance, when she talked to Miss McCroke about him, and drew upon herself that lady's mild reproof.

But Christmas came and brought no Rorie. He had gone off to spend his Christmas at the Duke of Dovedale's Scotch castle. Easter came, and still no

Rorie. He was at Putney, with the University crew, or in London with the Dovedales, riding in the Row, and forgetting dear old Hampshire and the last of the hunting, for which he would have been just in time.

Even the long vacation came without Rorie. He had gone for that promised tour in Switzerland, at his mother's instigation, and was only to come back late in the year to keep his twenty-first birthday, which was to be honoured in a very subdued and unhilarious fashion at Briarwood.

"Mamma," said Violet at breakfast-time one August morning, with her nose scornfully tilted, "what is Mr. Vawdrey like—dark or fair?"

"Why, Violet, you can't have forgotten him," said her mother, with languid astonishment.

"I think he has been away long enough for me to forget even the colour of his hair, mamma; and as he hasn't written to anybody, we may fairly suppose he has forgotten us."

"Vixen misses her old playfellow," said the squire, busy with the demolition of a grouse. "But Rorie is a young man now, you know, dear, and has work to do in the world—duties, my pet—duties."

"And is a young man's first duty to forget his old friends?" enquired Vixen, naively.

"My pet, you can't expect a lad of that kind to write letters. I am a deuced bad hand at letter-writing myself, and always was. I don't think a man's hand was ever made to pinch a pen. Nature has given us a broad strong grasp to grip a sword or a gun. Your mother writes most of my letters, Vixen, you know, and I shall expect you to help her in a year or two. Let me see; Rorie will be one-and-twenty in October, and there are to be high jinks at Briarwood, I believe, so there's something to look forward to, my dear."

"Edward!" exclaimed Mrs. Tempest, reproachfully; "you forget that Violet is not out. She will not be sixteen till next February."

"Bless her!" cried the squire, with a tender look at his only child, "she has grown up like a green bay-tree. But if this were to be quite a friendly affair at Briarwood, she might go merely——"

"It will not be a friendly affair," said Mrs. Tempest; "Lady Jane never gives friendly parties. There is nothing friendly in her nature, and I don't think she likes us—much. But I daresay we shall be

asked, and if we go I must have a new dress," added the gentle lady with a sigh of resignation. "It will be a dinner, no doubt; and the duke and duchess will be there, of course."

The card of invitation came in due course, three weeks before the birthday. It was to be a dinner, as Mrs. Tempest had opined. She wrote off to her milliner at once, and there was a passage of letters and fashion-plates and patterns of silk to and fro, and some of Mrs. Tempest's finest lace came out of the perfumed chest in which she kept her treasures, and was sent off to Madame Theodora.

Poor Vixen beheld these preparations with an aching heart. She did not care about dinner-parties in the least, but she would have liked to be with Roderick on his birthday. She would have liked it to have been a hunting-day, and to have ridden for a wild scamper across the hills with him—to have seen the rolling downs of the Wight blue in the distance—to have felt the soft south wind blowing in her face, and to have ridden by his side, neck and neck, all day long; and then to have gone home to the Abbey House to dinner, to the snug round table in the library, and the dogs, and papa in his happiest mood, expanding over his port and walnuts. That would have been a happy birthday for all of them, in Violet's opinion.

The squire and his daughter had plenty of hunting in this merry month of October, but there had been no sign of Rorie and his tall raking chestnut in the field, nor had anyone in the forest heard of or seen the young Oxonian.

"I daresay he is only coming home in time for the birthday," Mrs. Tempest remarked placidly, and went on with her preparations for that event.

She wanted to make a strong impression on the duchess, who had not behaved too well to her, only sending her invitations for indiscriminate afternoon assemblies, which Mrs. Tempest had graciously declined, pleading her feeble health as a reason for not going to garden-parties.

Vixen was in a peculiar temper during those three weeks, and poor Miss McCroke had hard work with her.

"Der, die, das," cried Vixen, throwing down her German Grammar in a rage one morning, when she had been making a muddle of the definite article in her exercise, and the patient governess had declared that they really must go back to

the very beginning of things. "What stupid people the Germans are! Why can't they have one little word for everything, as we have? T, h, e, the. Any child can learn that. What do they mean by chopping up their language into little bits, like the pieces in a puzzle? Why, even the French are more reasonable—though they're bad enough, goodness knows, with their hes and shes—feminine tables, and masculine beds. Why should I be bothered to learn all this rubbish? I'm not going to be a governess, and it will never be any use to me. Papa doesn't know a single sentence in French or German, and he's quite happy."

"But if your papa were travelling on the Continent, Violet, he would find his ignorance of the language a great deprivation."

"No, he wouldn't. He'd have a courier."

"Are you aware, my dear, that we have wasted five minutes already in this discursive conversation?" remarked Miss McCroke, looking at a fat useful watch, which she wore at her side in the good old fashion. "We will leave the grammar for the present, and you can repeat Schiller's Song of the Bell."

"I'd rather say the Dragon," said Vixen, "there's more fire and life in it. I do like Schiller, Crokey dear. But isn't it a pity he didn't write in English?"

And Vixen put her hands behind her, and began to spout the wonderful story of the knight who slew the dragon, and very soon her eyes kindled and her cheeks were aflame, and the grand verses were rolled out rapidly, with a more or less faulty pronunciation, but plenty of life and vehemence. This exercise of mind and memory suited Vixen a great deal better than dull plodding at the first principles of grammar, and the perpetual der, die, das.

This day was the last of October, and Roderick Vawdrey's birthday. He had not been seen at the Abbey House yet. He had come back to Briarwood before this, no doubt, but had not taken the trouble to come and see his old friends.

"He's a man now, and has duties, and has done with us," thought Vixen savagely.

She was very glad that it was such a wretched day—a hideous day for anyone's twenty-first birthday, ominous of all bad things, she thought. There was not a rift in the dull grey sky; the straight fine rain came down persistently, soaking

into the sodden earth, and sending up an odour of dead leaves. The smooth shining laurels in the shrubbery were the only things in nature that seemed no worse for the perpetual downpour. The gravel drives were spongy and sloppy. There was no hunting, or Vixen would have been riding her pony through rain and foul weather, and would have been comparatively independent of the elements. But to be at home all day, watching the rain, and thinking what a horrid, ungrateful young man Rorie was! That was dreary.

Mrs. Tempest went to her room to lie down directly after luncheon. She wanted to keep herself fresh for the evening. She made quite a solemn business of this particular dinner-party. At half-past five precisely, Pauline was to bring her a cup of tea. At six she was to begin to dress. This would give her an hour and a half for her toilet, as Briarwood was only half an hour's drive from the Abbey House. So for the rest of that day—until she burst upon their astonished view in her new dress—Mrs. Tempest would be invisible to her family.

"What a disgusting birthday," cried Vixen, sitting in the deep embrasure of the hall-window, with Argus at her side, dog and girl looking out at the glistening shrubbery.

Miss McCroke had gone to her room to write letters, or Vixen would have hardly been allowed to remain peacefully in such an inelegant position, her knees drawn up to her chin, her arms embracing her knees, her back against the stout oak shutter. Yet the girl and dog made rather a pretty picture, despite the inelegance of Vixen's attitude. The tawny hair, black velvet frock, and careless amber sash, amber stockings, and broad-toed Cromwell shoes; the tawny mastiff curled in the opposite corner of the deep recess; the old armorial bearings, sending pale shafts of parti-coloured light across Vixen's young head—a picture full of light and colour, framed in the dark brown oak.

"What an abominable birthday!" ejaculated Vixen; "if it were such weather as this on my twenty-first birthday I should think Nature had taken a dislike to me. But I don't suppose Rorie cares. He is playing billiards with a lot of his friends, and smoking, and making a horror of himself, I daresay, and hardly knows whether it rains or shines."

Drip, drip, drip, came the rain on the glistening leaves, berberis and laurel, bay



and holly, American oaks of richest red and bronze, copper beeches, tall rhododendrons, cypress of every kind, and behind them a dense black screen of yew. The late roses looked miserable. Vixen would have liked to have brought them in and put them by the hall fire—the good old hearth with its pile of blazing logs, before which Nip the pointer was stretched at ease, his muscular toes stiffening themselves occasionally, as if he were standing at a bird in his dreams.

Vixen went on watching the rain. It was rather a lazy way of spending the afternoon certainly, but Miss Tempest was out of humour with her little world, and did not feel equal to groping out the difficulties, the inexorable double sharps and odious double flats, in a waltz of Chopin's. She watched the straight thin rain, and thought about Rorie—chiefly to the effect that she hated him, and never could, by any possibility, like him again.

Gradually the trickle of the rain from an overflowing waterpipe took the sound of a tune. No Berceuse by Gounod was ever more rest-compelling. The full white lids drooped over the big brown eyes, the little locked hands loosened, the soft round chin fell forward on the knees, Argus gave a snort of satisfaction, and laid his heavy head on the velvet gown, and girl and dog were asleep. There was no sound in the wide old hall except the soft falling of wood ashes, the gentle breathing of girl and dogs.

Too pretty a picture assuredly to be lost to the eye of mankind.

Whose footstep was this sounding on the wet gravel half an hour later? Too quick and light for the squire's. Who was this coming in softly out of the rain, all dripping like a water-god? Who was this whose falcon eye took in the picture at a glance, and who stole cat-like to the window, and bending down his dark wet head, gave Violet's sleeping lips the first lover's kiss that had ever saluted them.

Violet awoke with a faint shiver of surprise and joy. Instinct told her from whom that kiss came, though it was the first time Roderick had kissed her since he went to Eton. The lovely brown eyes opened and looked into the dark grey ones. The ruddy brown head rested on Rorie's shoulder. The girl—half child, half woman, and all loving trustfulness, looked up at him with a glad smile. His heart was stirred with a new feeling as those softly bright eyes looked into his.

It was the early dawn of a passionate love. The head lying on his breast seemed to him the fairest thing on earth.

"Rorie, how disgracefully you have behaved, and how utterly I detest you!" exclaimed Vixen, giving him a vigorous push, and scrambling down from the window-seat. "To be all this time in Hampshire and never come near us."

A moment ago, in that first instant of a newly-awakened delight, she was almost betrayed into telling him that she loved him dearly, and had found life empty without him. But having had just time enough to recover herself, she drew herself up as straight as a dart, and looked at him as Kate may have looked at Petruchio during their first unpleasant interview.

"All this time!" cried Rorie. "Do you know how long I have been in Hampshire?"

"Haven't the least idea," retorted Vixen haughtily.

"Just half an hour—or, at least, it is exactly half an hour since I was deposited with all my goods and chattels at the Lyndhurst Road Station."

"You are only just home from Switzerland?"

"Within this hour!"

"And you have not even been to Briarwood?"

"My honoured mother still awaits my duteous greetings."

"And this is your twenty-first birthday, and you came here first of all."

And, almost uninvited, the tawny head dropped on to his shoulder again, and the sweet childish lips allowed themselves to be kissed.

"Rorie, how brown you have grown."

"Have I!"

The grey eyes were looking into the brown ones admiringly, and the conversation was getting a trifle desultory.

Swift as a flash, Violet recollected herself. It dawned upon her that it was not quite the right thing for a young lady "rising sixteen" to let herself be kissed so tamely. Besides, Rorie never used to do it. The thing was a new development, a curious outcome of his Swiss tour. Perhaps people did it in Switzerland, and Rorie had acquired the habit.

"How dare you do such a thing?" exclaimed Vixen, shaking herself free from the traveller's encircling arm.

"I didn't think you minded," said Rorie, innocently; "and when a fellow comes home from a long journey he expects a warm welcome!"

"And I am glad to see you," cried Vixen, giving him both her hands with a glorious frankness, "but you don't know how I have been hating you lately."

"Why, Vixen?"

"For being always away. I thought you had forgotten us all—that you did not care a jot for any of us."

"I had not forgotten any of you, and I did care—very much—for some of you."

This, though vague, was consoling.

The brown became Roderick. Dark of visage always, he was now tanned to a bronze as of one born under southern skies. Those deep grey eyes of his looked black under their black lashes. His black hair was cut close to the well-shaped head. An incipient moustache darkened his upper lip, and gave fresh manhood to the strong, firm mouth. A manly face altogether, Roderick's, and handsome withal. Vixen's short life had shown her none handsomer.

He was tall and strongly built, with a frame that had been developed by many an athletic exercise—from throwing the hammer to pugilism. Vixen thought him the image of Richard Cœur de Lion. She had been reading *The Talisman* lately, and the Plantagenet was her ideal of manly excellence.

"Many happy returns of the day, Rorie," she said softly. "To think that you are of age to-day. Your own master!"

"Yes, my infancy ceased and determined at the last stroke of midnight yesterday. I wonder whether my anxious mother will recognise that fact."

"Of course you know what is going to happen at Briarwood. There is to be a grand dinner-party."

"And you are coming? How jolly!"

"Oh no, Rorie. I'm not out yet, you know. I shan't be for two years. Papa means to give me a season in town. He calls it having me broken to harness. He'll take a furnished house, and we shall have the horses up, and I shall ride in the Row. You'll be with us part of the time, won't you, Rorie?"

"Ça se peut. If papa will invite me."

"Oh, he will, if I wish it. It's to be my first season, you know, and I'm to have everything my own way."

"Will that be a novelty?" demanded Roderick, with intention.

"I don't know. I haven't had my own way in anything lately."

"How is that?"

"You have been away!"

At this naïve flattery, Roderick almost blushed.

"How you've grown, Vixen," he remarked presently.

"Have I really? Yes, I suppose I do grow. My frocks are always getting too short."

"Like the sleeves of my dress-coats a year or two ago."

"But now you are of age, and can't grow any more. What are you going to be, Rorie? What are you going to do with your liberty? Are you going into Parliament?"

Mr. Vawdrey indulged in a suppressed yawn.

"My mother would like it," he said, "but, upon my word, I don't care about it. I don't take enough interest in my fellow-creatures."

"If they were foxes, you'd be anxious to legislate for them," suggested Vixen.

"I would certainly try to protect them from indiscriminate slaughter. And, in fact, when one considers the looseness of existing game laws, I think every country gentleman ought to be in Parliament."

"And there is the forest for you to take care of."

"Yes, forestry is a subject on which I should like to have my say. I suppose I shall be obliged to turn senator. But I mean to take life easily. You may be sure of that, Vixen, and I intend to have the best stud of hunters in Hampshire. And now I think I must be off."

"No, you mustn't," cried Violet. "The dinner is not till eight. If you leave here at six you will have no end of time for getting home to dress. How did you come?"

"On these two legs."

"You shall have four to take you to Briarwood. West shall drive you home in papa's dogcart, with the new mare. You don't know her, do you? Papa only bought her last spring. She is such a beauty, and goes—goes—oh, like a sky-rocket. She bolts occasionally; but you don't mind that, do you?"

"Not in the least. It would be rather romantic to be smashed on one's twenty-first birthday. Will you tell them to order West to get ready at once."

"Oh, but you are to stop to tea with Miss McCroke and me—that's part of our bargain. No kettledrum, no Starlight Bess! And you'd scarcely care about walking to Briarwood under such rain as that!"

"So be it, then; kettledrum and Starlight Bess, at any hazard of maternal wrath. But really now, I'm doing a most ungentlemanly thing, Vixen, to oblige you."

"Always be ungentlemanly then for my sake—if it's ungentlemanly to come and see me," said Vixen coaxingly.

They were standing side by side in the big window looking out at the straight thin rain. The two pairs of lips were not very far away from each other, and Rorie might have been tempted to commit a third offence against the proprieties, if Miss McCroke had not fortunately entered at this very moment. She was wonderfully surprised at seeing Mr. Vawdrey, congratulated him ceremoniously upon his majority, and infused an element of stiffness into the small assembly.

"Rorie is going to stay to tea," said Vixen. "We'll have it here by the fire, please, Crokey dear. One can't have too much of a good fire this weather—or shall we go to my den? Which would you like best, Rorie?"

"I think we had better have tea here, Violet," interjected Miss McCroke, ringing the bell.

Her pupil's sanctum sanctorum—that pretty upstairs room, half schoolroom, half boudoir, and wholly untidy—was not, in Miss McCroke's opinion, an apartment to be violated by the presence of a young man.

"And as Rorie hasn't had any luncheon, and has come ever so far out of his way to see me, please order something substantial for him," said Vixen.

Her governess obeyed. The gipsy-table was wheeled up to the broad hearth, and presently the old silver teapot and kettle and the yellow cups and saucers were shining in the cheery firelight. The old butler put a sirloin and a game-pie on the sideboard, and then left the little party to shift for themselves, in pleasant picnic fashion.

Vixen sat down before the hissing tea-kettle with a pretty important air, like a child making tea out of toy tea-things. Rorie brought a low square stool to a corner close to her, and seated himself with his chin a little above the tea-table.

"You can't eat roast beef in that position," said Vixen.

"Oh yes, I can—I can do anything that's mad or merry this evening. But I'm not at all sure that I want beef, though it is nearly three months since

I've seen an honest bit of ox beef. I think thin bread and butter—or roses and dew even—quite substantial enough for me this evening."

"You're afraid of spoiling your appetite for the grand dinner," said Vixen.

"No, I'm not. I hate grand dinners. Fancy making a fine art of eating, and studying one's menu beforehand to see what combination of dishes will harmonise best with one's internal economy. And then the names of the things are always better than the things themselves. It's like a show at a fair, all the best outside. Give me a slice of English beef or mutton, and a bird that my gun has shot, and let all the fine-art dinners go hang."

"Cut him a slice of beef, dear Miss McCroke," said Vixen.

"Not now, thanks; I can't eat now. I'm going to drink orange-peko."

Argus had taken up his position between Violet and her visitor. He sat bolt upright, like a sentinel keeping guard over his mistress.

"Are you very glad to come of age, Rorie?" asked Vixen, turning her bright brown eyes upon him, full of curiosity.

"Well, it will be rather nice to have as much money as I want without asking my mother for it. She was my only guardian, you know. My father had such confidence in her rectitude and capacity that he left everything in her hands."

"Do you find Briarwood much improved?" enquired Miss McCroke.

Lady Jane had been doing a good deal to her orchid-houses lately.

"I haven't found Briarwood at all yet," answered Rorie, "and Vixen seems determined I shan't find it."

"What, have you only just returned?"

"Only just."

"And you have not seen Lady Jane yet?" exclaimed Miss McCroke with a horrified look.

"It sounds rather undutiful, doesn't it? I was awfully tired, after travelling all night; and I made this a kind of half-way house."

"Two sides of a triangle are always longer than any one side," remarked Vixen, gravely. "At least, that's what Miss McCroke has taught me."

"It was rather out of my way, of course. But I wanted to see whether Vixen had grown. And I wanted to see the squire."

"Papa has gone to Ringwood, to look at a horse; but you'll see him at the

grand dinner. He'll be coming home to dress presently."

"I hope you had an agreeable tour, Mr. Vawdrey," said Miss McCroke.

"Oh, uncommonly jolly."

"And you like Switzerland?"

"Yes; it's nice and hilly."

And then Roderick favoured them with a sketch of his travels, while they sipped their tea, and while Vixen made the dogs balance pieces of cake on their big blunt noses.

It was all very nice—the Tête Noire, and Mont Blanc, and the Matterhorn. Rorie jumbled them all together, without the least regard to geography. He had done a good deal of climbing, had worn out and lost dozens of alpenstocks, and had brought home a case of Swiss carved work for his friends.

"There's a clock for your den, Vixen—I shall bring it to-morrow—with a little cock-robin that comes out of his nest and sings—no end of jolly."

"How lovely!" cried Violet.

The tall eight-day clock in a corner of the hall chimed the half-hour.

"Half-past five, and Starlight Bess not ordered!" exclaimed Roderick.

"Let's go out to the stables and see about her," suggested Vixen. "And then I can show you my pony. You remember Titmouse, the one that *would* jump?"

"Violet!" ejaculated the aggrieved governess. "Do you suppose I would permit you to go out of doors in such weather?"

"Do you think it's still raining?" asked Vixen, innocently. "It may have cleared up. Well, we'd better order the cart," she added meekly, as she rang the bell. "I'm not of age yet, you see, Rorie. Please, Peters, tell West to get papa's dogcart ready for Mr. Vawdrey, and to drive Starlight Bess."

Rorie looked at the bright face admiringly. The shadows had deepened; there was no light in the great oak-paneled room except the ruddy fire-glow, and in this light Violet Tempest looked her loveliest. The figures in the tapestry seemed to move in the flickering light—appeared and vanished, vanished and appeared, like the phantoms of a dream. The carved bosses of the ceiling were reflected grotesquely on the oaken wall above the tapestry. The stags' heads had a goblin look. It was like a scene of enchantment, and Violet, in her black frock and amber sash, looked like the enchantress—

Mélusine, or somebody of equally dubious antecedents.

It was Miss McCroke's sleepest hour. Orange-peko, which has an awakening influence upon most people, acted as an opiate upon her. She sat blinking owlishly at the two young figures.

Rorie roused himself with a great effort.

"Unless Starlight Bess spins me along the road pretty quickly, I shall hardly get to Briarwood by dinner-time," he said; "and, upon my honour, I don't feel the least inclination to go."

"Oh, what fun if you were absent at your coming-of-age dinner!" cried Vixen, with her brown eyes dancing mischievously. "They would have to put an empty chair for you, like Banquo's."

"It would be a lark," acquiesced Rorie, "but it wouldn't do. Now for Starlight Bess."

They went into the vestibule, and Rorie opened the door, letting in a gust of wind and rain, and the scent of autumn's last ill-used flowers.

"Oh, I so nearly forgot," said Violet, as they stood on the threshold, side by side, waiting for the dogcart to appear. "I've got a little present for you—quite a humble one for a grand young landowner like you—but I never could save much of my pocket-money; there are so many poor children always having scarlet fever, or tumbling into the fire, or drinking out of boiling tea-kettles. But here it is, Rorie. I hope you won't hate it very much."

She put a little square packet into his hand, which he proceeded instantly to open.

"I shall love it, whatever it is."

"It's a portrait."

"You darling! The very thing I should have asked for."

"The portrait of someone you're fond of."

"Someone I adore," said Rorie.

He had extracted the locket from its box by this time. It was a thick oblong locket of dead gold, plain and massive; the handsomest of its kind that a Southampton jeweller could supply.

Rorie opened it eagerly, to look at the portrait.

There was just light enough from the newly-kindled vestibule lamp to show it to him.

"Why, it's a dog!" cried Rorie, with deep-toned disgust. "It's old Argus."

"Who did you think it was?"



"You, of course."

"What an idea! As if I should give anyone my portrait. I knew you were fond of Argus. Doesn't his head come out beautifully? The photographer said he was the best sitter he had had for ever so long. I hope you don't quite detest the locket, Rorie."

"I admire it intensely, and I'm deeply grateful. But I feel inexpressibly sold, all the same. And I am to go about the world with Argus dangling at my breast. Well, for your sake, Vixen, I'll submit even to that degradation."

Here came the cart, with two flaming lamps, like angry eyes flashing through the shrubberies. It pulled up at the steps. Rorie and Vixen clasped hands and bade good-night, and then the young man swung himself lightly into the seat beside the driver, and away went Starlight Bess, making just that sort of dashing and spirited start which inspires the beholder with the idea that the next proceeding will be the bringing home of the driver and his companion upon a brace of shutters.

#### FRENCH SPECTACLES.

SINCE the day when Sterne wrote the generally misquoted sentence, "They order this matter better in France," there has arisen in this country a race of Gallomanes, or Gallophiles—whichever the polite reader pleases—the object of whose otherwise useless and purposeless lives has been to exalt France at the expense of England. It is generally France that is extolled, albeit Germany, Italy, and, in some cases—very far gone these—America is praised, while England is held up to derision. Idle people of artistic tendencies living in Italy are, perhaps, so far as they go, the most insufferable nuisance in this particular direction. They talk and write trash about a climate which burns you to death in summer, gives you the ague, if no more deadly fever, in autumn, and in which it is simply impossible to keep oneself warm and comfortable in winter. They put up with filth and hideous stench, and abominations innumerable, against which they would rise in rebellion at home, and then come home to England and abuse everything. Neither Byron nor Thackeray was exempt from this national weakness. The former professed to hate England, mainly, I take it, because he, though brilliantly successful as a poet, was a failure as a lord. In one

of his smartest outbreaks against England, he complains that "bating Covent Garden, I can hit on no place that's called piazza in Great Britain." Why should we call a square a piazza, or, like the Americans, confound the open space, or real piazza, with the arcades which surround it? Even here, I doubt whether the majority of persons who know Covent Garden do not think the covered pathway is the piazza. This is one precious effect of adopting foreign words in "softer accents spoke:" the real meaning of the word is lost, or hopelessly confused and misapplied. All these lovers of the sunny south who curse the "wild north-easter," choose to forget that there are such things as the sirocco and the mistral, in face of which man and beast shrivel up, and seek the nearest shelter. Thackeray did not so much abuse England as the English, and with extraordinary acuteness marked that the reason why Englishmen never brag about their country is not to be sought in their native modesty, but in a sublime assurance that their position in the world is beyond doubt or cavil, argument or demonstration; just as a duke may wear a shocking bad hat, or a marquis, of old creation, take no heed that the elbows of his coat shine with an unhealthy gloss. According to the theory of Thackeray, it is the person uncertain of his rank and position who is given to "protest too much." Hence the Briton never brags of his country. He listens calmly to what "moosoo" has to say about la belle France, to Hans's twaddle about fatherland, to Uncle Sam's blather about the size and depth and wealth of his great country. John Bull does not care a penny piece for all this. Inspired by the noble consciousness of superiority, he listens in an attitude of patient contempt, and lets the vapouring foreigner prose on. Opinions may vary as to the right of the Briton to assume this position. Probably he is not much better or worse than other people, but if it suit him to keep his consciousness of superiority to himself, that delicious sensation can hurt nobody. Unfortunately, he has gone somewhat farther on the road to self-abnegation than mere reticence as to his own merit and praise of that of foreigners. He has gone deliberately to work to scold himself, or rather his social inferiors of the same nation. It has pleased him just of late to express his sympathy for the inhabitants of Paris and other places under the infliction of

the English tourist. John Bull, who esteems himself possessed of culture, has thought well to laugh consumedly at uncultivated John, and to point out his absurd side to foreign countries. Ordinary John Bull has been turned inside out, and held up to derision by his more highly-instructed brother; has been told that his vulgarity is all too scandalous; that he does not know how to conduct himself either in public or in private; that his hulking ways and coarse voice make exhibitions hideous and galleries loathsome; that, to sum up all, Superfine John is very much ashamed of Inferior ditto, and wishes he would stay at home, do his work, and not go out and disgrace the family.

This is all excellently well in its way, no doubt. If, indeed, our language were absolutely unknown to Adolphe and Auguste, it would not much matter, for the reader of the jokes before mentioned, as the listener to a sermon, always knows somebody else who must be meant by the satirist or the preacher. But, unfortunately, even Adolphe and Auguste know something of the English language, and, finding our leaders of thought and self-constituted pastors and masters disgusted with the representative tourist, have also turned to rend him. They have taken his money pretty freely for the last six months, it is true, but that is no reason why they should not laugh at him into the bargain. They have given him very indifferent value for that same hard cash of his. They have charged him twice the ordinary price for his lodging; in the matter of meat and drink they have, not to put too fine a point upon it, cheated him roundly. For the eternal two-franc dinner, with its sauce à la gargote to every dish, they have charged that vulgar Briton five. They have gotten the better of him in cab fares, and taxed his baggage heavily at the railway station. They have agreed to keep their show open for an extra three weeks, that Inferior Bull may stay yet a while longer, to eat two-franc dinners at five francs a head, and perhaps buy the pretty things at the great show. But they love him not, although they pouch his money readily enough, and they will have their not very good-natured laugh at him.

No one could have questioned their right to laugh at Inferior Bull, if it pleased them to do so. There is not so much fun in the world that we can afford to spare any of it, if it be only reasonably fresh and genuine. Had Adolphe said to Auguste,

"Curse them for me here," and Auguste, after studying the little vulgarities and awkwardnesses of English people, had held them up to scorn, nobody would have relished the fun better than the English themselves. Men and women who had chuckled over the sharp criticism of M. Francis Wey, M. Assollant, M. Taine, and other chasteners of the gloomy and splenetic insularity, would have heartily enjoyed a portrait of the vulgar tourist sketched by a keen Parisian pen; but the oddest part of the whole thing is that the French gentleman who wrote a recent article in the *Gaulois*, instead of recording his own observations, has repeated all the stupid old stock stories and jokes against the Briton. It is easy to imagine Adolphe of the *Gaulois* saying to Auguste of the same influential journal, "Go now. Write me somewhat against these animals of English," and equally easy to follow Auguste in his work. He goes not to the Exhibition to sketch "these animals" from the life—far from it; for is not Auguste a writer endowed with verve, entrain, and all the other inestimable qualities which dispense their fortunate proprietor from the necessity of knowing anything of his subject?

Auguste of the *Gaulois* would as soon perish as put his foot within the Exhibition, but makes for his modest apartments, taking his favourite café by the way. Here he stops for absinthe, and engages the waiter in conversation touching *Niniche* and the races on the following Sunday. At last he reaches his dwelling, and then sits down to a cigarette and work. The mental exercise through which he first puts himself is an effort to recollect all the striking points of that celebrated farce, *Les Anglaises pour Rire*. It is very old this farce; but it has the merit of having stamped upon the Gallic brain the original conception of the stage Englishman as imagined by a French playwright. That the French stage Englishman is as like the average Briton as Hogarth's Frenchmen are like the late M. Jules Janin or M. Théophile Gautier, as Ben in *Love for Love* is like Hobart Pasha, as Pigault le Brun's Lord Spleen is like Lord Granville, matters not a jot, for Auguste of the *Gaulois* knows quite well that if he depart from the accepted stage type, he will displease his countrymen, who, despite their inalienable right to "initiate ideas," are the most conventional of living beings. So *Gaulois* Auguste sits down to create,

as he would call it, but, in fact, to vamp up, from stale theatrical traditions and recollections of the caricatures of the Charivari and the Journal Amusant, sundry fantastic figures, to be forthwith labelled Anglais and Anglaise. He knows exactly what these must be to suit the taste of his readers. He knows that their hair must be red; their protruding teeth huge as the keys of a pianoforte; their jaws, vast; their figures, uncouth, and their apparel ungainly. He knows that if in one of those plays he constructs so cleverly, and writes with such marvellous point and neatness, he were to introduce an Englishman like Sir Garnet Wolseley or Lord Carnarvon, his audience would decline to accept him, while they would revel in the red-haired, big-toothed conventionalism; so he gives the readers of the Gaulois what he knows will please them—the stage idea of an Englishman. This is a safe if not a very brilliant method, and is sure to be accepted by the great majority of his countrymen—that is to say, of people who never travel, who speak no language, and consequently care for no literature but their own. Thus, without an atom of either observation or invention, he produces an extremely well-written and amusing article, in which the recognised appearance of the islander and his clumsy ways are duly laughed at. A stage low-comedy Englishman and Englishwoman are taken as types of the rank and file of visitors to the Paris Exhibition. These are strange creatures, quite out of order with the general physiognomy of Paris, and repulsive to eyes accustomed to gaze on Adolphe and Auguste in their tight clothes and tighter boots. Adolphe and Auguste are models of symmetry, of course, and their innocent gaiety never sinks to vulgarity. They are careful to be always well-gloved, and their little billycock hats are models of jauntiness. Their ebon locks are every now and then arranged in quiet nooks and corners by the aid of a pocket-comb and looking-glass, instruments without which no Frenchman's attire is complete. Their cravats are tied with a nattiness unknown to the gloomy islander, and their gallantry in providing their fair companions with refreshments is proverbial. This same gallantry is hardly shown to advantage in the conventional portraits of Englishwomen. It is a small matter that our male kind are represented as monsters, whose huge boots are for ever treading on the dainty chaussure of the Parisian; that, wrapped in insular

"morgue" and blinded by "spleen," they forget to raise their hats at every instant, sit down upon those of their French neighbours, and go to the theatre in garments of which a Seine canotier would be ashamed; but Auguste has for once forgotten his admiration of the "blonde meess." She is a shapeless creature, gaunt of form and hideous of attire, moving like a walking stalk of asparagus with giant strides in boots of vast size and dreadful outline; the whole enormity being completed by the eternal opera-glass—a gruesome vision of female ugliness.

A very short stay in Paris will convince any unprejudiced spectator that this over-charged picture is utterly unlike anything in nature. That the hundreds of thousands of English folk who have visited Paris this season were all well-bred, well-dressed, or well-behaved would be contended by not one of them; but their critics would do well to recollect that the English visitors who have done so much to enrich Paris were only, to a very limited extent, composed of "persons bearing letters of introduction," and have actually consisted of a large section of our population, the French analogues of whom never stir beyond their native commune. To English people, of all but the poorest class, a trip to Paris is not an act of unparalleled extravagance. The classes who hoard their money in France are in England content to spend it on a summer holiday; and the result of this free-handed method is, that thousands of hard-working people, who never heard of a man carrying a pocket-comb and looking-glass, and would despise him if they did, have taken their pleasure in Paris, and have gone thither in the ordinary travelling or shooting-dress worn in English provincial towns or at the seaside. If they had waited till they could afford an elaborate outfit of clothes, they would never have got to Paris at all to enrich Adolphe and Auguste with their little savings. It is, therefore, grossly unfair to compare their personal appearance with that of members of the French Jockey Club. If it is compared with that of the few French people of narrow means who have visited Paris this year, it will hardly suffer. In the matter of impossible hats, ungainly clothing, and boorish manners, the provincial Frenchman is difficult to beat. His general awkwardness and stupid wonder at all that he sees have no parallel among the morose islanders who have irritated the delicate nerves of



the Gaulois, and suggest the question how many points in elegance of dress and deportment can Brittany, for instance, give to Yorkshire, or Normandy to Lancashire? Devoid of "spleen," the French yokels wander about the Exhibition, uttering dull remarks in such a loud tone as to be a nuisance to the bystanders, and only exhibit acuteness when the exorbitant charges of the Parisians come under discussion.

In sober truth, the critic of the Gaulois has trusted his native verve far too implicitly, and in relying on tradition and a lively style to supply the place of observation has blundered, as only clever people can blunder. He has been told that English people, who understand France, disavow and condemn the ordinary tourist, and he has revived the threadbare caricatures of Englishmen to hold the guests of France up to ridicule. His remarks, which might, if he had taken pains, been pleasant and pungent enough, have thus missed their mark, and laid bare a want of knowledge not uncommon in French journalists. Like the pundits who met to discuss the nose of Slawkenbergius, he has disdained to encumber himself with facts, and has run a close match with that other ingenious French gentleman who recently described the promotion of Lord Beaconsfield to a higher rank in the English peerage as Earl "Tairns."

#### PERSONALLY CONDUCTED.

##### XI.

CONSIDERABLY sobered is poor Checksuit by his narrow escape. For he does escape. We stand, as I have said, quite at the head of the crevasse, and, though it widens out rapidly a little farther on, at the point for which he is making it is not above four or five feet across. Quite enough to have sufficed for poor Checksuit, but, fortunately, not so wide but that the guide's alpenstock, struck firmly into the ice-cliff on the opposite side, affords a support which enables him to arrest the descent—just in time. Even as it is, he very nearly misses his grasp. Fortunately, the obstacle, whatever it may be, which turns Checksuit aside from his original line of descent, directs his course to the right instead of to the left, or he must inevitably have made the awful plunge, and very possibly taken the guide with him. As it is, his course is not arrested till he has plunged above his knees into the drifted snow which fills the

upper part of the crevasse; and a huge mass of which, loosened by his struggles, thunders down from under his feet into the abyss as Jean drags him bodily out by the collar, and deposits him, white and gasping, upon the snow at our feet.

How Mr. Neville can have the heart to scold him as he does I really do not know. As I look up astonished from my resting-place on the snow, I see the usually sleepy blue eyes positively flash with anger. To be flung "neck and heels" into the beautiful blue depths, from which he has so narrowly escaped, would be a severe punishment for risking his own life, or even, as Mr. Neville fiercely tells him, mine. And the poor little man is so crest-fallen, so penitent over the possible results of his little escapade, and so patient under the castigation it has brought upon him, that I really feel bound to intercede.

Then for the moment I almost think Mr. Neville is going to scold—me! Certainly sleepiness is not the characteristic of the glance under which I begin to feel the truant blood coming back into my cheeks with inconvenient rapidity. On the whole, it seems to me that the wisest thing I can do is to drop my own eyes, and create a diversion by scrambling to my feet again as quickly as possible. By the time I have done so, Mr. Neville has recovered to some extent his usual imperturbability, and motions silently to Jean to conduct the now perfectly amenable Checksuit up the slope again. I put out my hand that he may perform the same office by me, but his grasp closes firmly upon it and holds me back, and we both stand silently till the guide, having deposited Checksuit safely on the other side, comes back to afford the additional security of his presence. How long this interval is, I don't quite know. Perhaps I have not quite got over the shock of seeing poor Checksuit rushing apparently to instant destruction, for my heart is still fluttering rather wildly, and it is only when I put my left hand into the horny grasp of our friend Jean, that I discover that the by no means horny fingers of my other supporter have almost squeezed my right into a jelly. Mr. Neville himself does not seem to recognise the fact even now. Indeed his oburgation of poor Checksuit appears to have exhausted the never too-abundant springs of his eloquence altogether, and except for an occasional slight clearing of the throat, which somehow sets my heart off again each time, as though the scolding



must surely be coming at last, it is in perfect silence that we make our way back to the top of the treacherous slope. There we stand for a moment for just one last look back at the dark blue line along the foot of the light blue ice-cliff, which from here alone marks the scene of our recent escape, and then Mr. Neville clears his throat once more, and we resume our route as silently as ever.

And so we make our way back to the hotel at last, and at dinner poor Checksuit, who is still uncommonly small, applies himself steadily to the consumption of what he calls "cham," and becoming slightly maudlin under its influence, assures me, with tears in his eyes, that rather than have given me such a start, Joseph would have broke his own stupid little neck 'arf-a-undred times over. And Sunday comes and goes; marked chiefly by renewed apologies on the part of the penitent little man, whose remorse for the danger to which he has exposed me is decidedly aggravated by grief for the loss of his own beloved alpenstock, reposing now in the recesses of the frozen sea. He plucks up a little, however, in the afternoon, and when Nellie and Mr. Neville and I go out for a stroll to the pretty little waterfall about halfway up the path towards the Pierre Pointue, actually makes a faint attempt to join us. Perhaps, however, yesterday's adventure has quickened his apprehension, for my hasty suggestion that he should, at least, secure a new staff before going on any fresh excursion, is at once accepted as the hint it is certainly intended to convey. He might, perhaps, have notified its acceptance in some less embarrassing way than in the announcement that it's all right, and Joseph don't want to spoil sport, you know. But it is, at all events, a satisfaction when, at the first shop we encounter with its bundle of alpenstocks, and its legend over the door to the effect that here one charges oneself to inscribe upon the mountain-sticks the names of all the passes a traveller may desire—quite irrespective, of course, of any claim to their personal acquaintance—our undesired escort takes his leave and busies himself with repairing his loss. He repairs it to some purpose too. His new "mountain-stick" is half as long again, the horn which decks its summit twice as sharp as the last, and decorated, moreover, with an elegant fringe of chamois hair, which gives it a most full-dressed appearance. And

round it twine in an elegant spiral, the names, not merely of the original "Riggy," but of the Brunig, and the Giessbach, and Interlachen, and Martigny, and some half-score or so more, winding up with the redoubtable Mer de Glace itself; the text, no doubt, of many a thrilling tale, in which we shall all hereafter figure under, perhaps, slightly modified circumstances, for the edification of its owner's companions of the desk or the counter.

Then Monday morning comes, and we bid farewell to the Alps. There is quite a battalion of diligences drawn up in the little square in front of our hotel. Capacious machines they are too; double-storied, like those in which we made our first famous excursion to Versailles, but with gaily-striped awnings spread over the upper tier of seats, to protect us from the sun, which even at our starting hour of seven o'clock is sufficiently powerful to call loudly for some defence of the kind. Each huge vehicle must carry at least from thirty to forty passengers; but our party alone are considerably more than enough to fill one; and we are by no means the only travellers on the road. Chamounix, it seems, like Interlachen, is a recognised halting-place for Sunday, and there must be at least a hundred other candidates for seats in the great yellow caravans, round which the clamorous crowd of tourists, and guides, and porters, officials, and non-officials of every kind, has been seething tumultuously since before six o'clock. The confusion is not, on the whole, much lessened by the fact that there are apparently two "conducteurs," who may or may not be twin-brothers, but whose likeness to each other is so extraordinary that it is only when one at last comes upon the two of them together that one achieves even a suspicion of their duality. Meanwhile it appears to be the almost universal fate to appeal to Dromio of Syracuse for information as to the disposal of luggage, which half an hour before had been handed to Dromio of Ephesus for bestowal in the gaping recesses of boot or grating; or to expostulate vainly with Dromio of Ephesus upon the non-fulfilment of pledges as to special seats in this or that coveted corner, duly made under seal and sanction of surreptitious three-franc pieces with him of Syracuse. The gentleman from Manchester, who has not come victorious out of a severe engagement with the lordly head-waiter in the English whiskers over a disputed "syphon and cognac," declares that this is a deliberate arrangement

expressly made for the purpose of enabling either Dromio to defraud the too-confiding passenger of the seat he has bribed him doubly to retain. At all events, it has the highly moral effect of entirely neutralising any irregular compacts of the kind, and as our twin-conductors happily resemble each other not only in the minor matters of eyes and noses, but in the more fundamental characteristics of imperturbable good temper and remarkable power of appreciating the humour of the situation, we all at length shake ourselves, or get shaken, into such places as have no doubt been designed for us from the first. So with the usual concert of jingling bells, and trampling feet, and squeaking horns, and cracking whips, the long procession starts at length upon its way, Checksuit's blue-moon handkerchief floating triumphantly over the leading caravan from the summit of his new alpenstock, as he kisses his hand in affectionate farewell to a severe-visaged British matron who, with her five daughters and the governess, has paused in her morning ramble to see us off.

And a beautiful drive we have. It is a little disappointing, perhaps, to find that there is no "pass" to surmount, as there was in the case of our other two carriage journeys over the Brunig and the Tête Noire. Decidedly the best part of a diligence trip is that scrambling out at the foot of a nice long hill, up which you can make your way on your own feet, away from the noise and the dust and the—well, as we are getting so near the end of our tour, I may venture to say the stupid remarks of the rest of the party. For the first two or three miles, too, it looks as if we were sure to have a good long climb. The road is sinking a little certainly, and the noisy stream that winds by its side roars and dashes over the huge round boulders that strew its bed in a way that sufficiently emphasises the fact that so far at least we are unmistakably going down hill. But the nearer we approach the lower end of the valley the loftier the huge rugged mountains tower across our path, till those over which we passed the other day on our way from Martigny seem mere hillocks in comparison. Two or three miles upon our road we pass a narrow track, which a finger-post proclaims to be the route to the Pavillon de Belle Vue, from which, as Mr. Neville tells us, is to be had the finest view in the whole valley. And certainly the towering masses of rock all around us, some of them, as it seems, rising

up for thousands of feet in sheer perpendicular cliff, are incomparably grander and more savage than anything we have seen yet. We are really beginning to wonder, like good King George with the apple-dumplings, how on earth this huge machine upon which we are travelling, and which must surely be quite as much as its five heavy grey horses can conveniently manage on level ground, can ever have been got into the valley. If the road goes over the very lowest of these frowning giants that seem to hem us in all round, we shall have walking exercise enough to satisfy the most restless among us. But alas, just as I come to the conclusion that we can go no farther without inevitably commencing the wished-for climb, comes a turn in the road, and a narrow winding gorge opens out among the cliffs. And instead of ascending, we begin to descend more rapidly than before through what Mr. Neville tells us is a sort of miniature imitation of the Via-Mala on a microscopic scale. And so we wind and wriggle our way out from among the mountains with scarcely a tightened trace, except when we pass over one steep, narrow bridge, where, for a few moments, it seems as though the huge machine were going to prove too much for the not very powerful team that is here harnessed to it, and drag back them and us bodily over the low parapet into the roaring stream below. The two improvable young ladies give a succession of little shrieks, and Miss Lydyer makes evident preparations for fainting in Mr. Newcome's arms. But before she has time to carry them out the difficulty has been surmounted, and we all—poor Mr. Newcome, I fancy, especially—breathe again.

We have said a final good-bye to the mountains now. From Geneva, Mr. Neville tells us, we shall have a last peep at Mont Blanc, but it will be only as a white cloud upon the distant sky. At present, with almost every mile we travel, the scenery around us softens visibly down till the towering mountain masses have melted into almost level plain, and we draw near our journey's end at Geneva.

I wonder, by-the-way, where and what the French frontier on this side towards Switzerland really is. There was not much to mark it certainly, as we passed from one country into the other on our way over the Tête Noire. But one could, at least, imagine a line over the mountain-tops. Here, as we jingle along the level road through an almost continuous succession of villages,

gardens, and country houses, there really seems no conceivable place at which, as people say, to "draw the line." By-and-by we are rattling through the streets of Geneva itself, and presently the light blue waters of the lake come once more into view, and the huge machine pulls up after its nine hours' journey at the door of the hotel. And an enormous hotel it is. No doubt it looks all the taller from the absence of the mountainous background, which has dwarfed the proportions of the loftiest buildings we have encountered for a long time past. But I give a little gasp as I look up at range upon range of windows towering up against the sky, and sympathise more heartily than usual in the clamour that arises as landing after landing is passed on the way to our predestined attics. It is of no use, of course. That room on the second floor with the windows looking out upon the lake, which as usual falls to Mr. Neville's lot, is as usual also, the only vacant apartment in the hotel, except those specially retained for us by what Monsieur le Propriétaire evidently considers a very special act of condescension. As for their situation, why, as Checksuit—whose Saturday's adventure seems to have disposed him to view things in general in a pleasant light—philosophically observes, the cream always does go to the top, you know; and if it be the lot of a Gawd's Tourist to gravitate inevitably skywards, I suppose that also must be set down to "the eternal fitness of things."

Certainly the view from my lofty window, when I do reach it, has one strong recommendation. Consisting exclusively of a dead wall and a row of chimney-pots, it brightens wonderfully the effect of the brilliant panorama of town and lake which greets us, as after luncheon we sally out again into the sunny gardens, that spread between us and the water's edge, for our last day's lionising in Switzerland.

Perhaps it is because it is the last, that we do it, if possible, even more conventionally than usual. Perhaps it is because I have been—as I am to some extent conscious of being—seized with something very like a fit of perverseness, that I prefer the hot tramp from Calvin's cathedral to the Russian Church, and thence to the Musée Rath and the meeting of the waters, and half-a-dozen other orthodox "sights," to that saunter by the lake-shore which Mr. Neville has suggested as an alternative, of course. I hope I am not growing malicious. Certainly, if

there be anyone of my friends whose misfortunes ought to be exempt from the action of La Rochefoucauld's cynical suggestion, it should be Mr. Neville. However Master Checksuit's glissade might have ended for himself, it is very certain that, but for Mr. Neville's promptitude and skill, it would have, at all events, swept me far enough beyond any question of further sight-seeing. So if the fact that I am not at this moment lying at the bottom of a cold blue crevasse be any claim for sympathy, assuredly I ought to sympathise with my preserver. And the depths of boredom to which poor Mr. Neville is being subjected in our breathless race over the city of Calvin might move the sympathy of the very stones over which we tramp.

Yet somehow I don't seem to sympathise with him in the least. On the contrary, the more bored he seems, the more ridiculously I appear to enjoy myself. I am afraid my pleasure cannot have been of a very intellectual description. My reminiscences of Geneva, at all events, are decidedly chaotic. What there was to see at the museum, or how we got to Rousseau's island, or what connection there was between them; or between either of them and the meeting of the rivers, I could no more tell than I could describe the "concatenation accordingly" of my last nightmare. My only distinct remembrance is of the look of intense disgust that comes into poor Mr. Neville's face as Checksuit, after loudly enquiring who the deuce Calvin was, insists upon clambering into the sacred pulpit, and "having a whack at the old bloke's cushion," and the blank dismay to which it changes as, for the life of me, I cannot restrain myself from breaking out into a little idiotic giggle at the contrast between the two.

The result of all which is that no sooner is dinner fairly over than, in the exercise of her new authority, Mrs. Crumpelhorne pronounces that the heat and the excitement have been too much for me. We shall be travelling all to-morrow night, she says, and therewith packs me straight off to bed. I feel half inclined to be a little rebellious; but the old lady lifts her eyebrows at me with such a comically knowing look that somehow all the audacity seems suddenly to ooze out of me, and I go off to my aerial attic as meek as any mouse.

The next morning I am in my right mind again. Our careful chaperon will not let us do much, in consideration of



the coming night journey. But we all go for a row on the lake in a great green painted boat, with a broad red-and-white striped awning, and very pleasant it is, and very lovely the distant mountains look in their morning robes of blue-grey haze, now that we are saying a final good-bye to them. I am really beginning to feel quite sentimental about it, or should do so, were not our usual antidote to anything of the kind promptly at hand. We have been very artful, and have driven to a distant landing-place to take our boat, flattering ourselves that we have thereby escaped observation. But, clever as we are, Checksuit has been too many for us. Splash, splash, splash — bump, bump, bump — we hear the sound of pursuing oars, and in another moment comes the familiar "Ere y'are!" prefacing a playful offer to row us round the lake "for 'arf-a-crown a si——"

The offer is cut short by a sudden assertion of independence on the part of Checksuit's oar, the blade of which peremptorily declines to quit the water, whilst the handle hits the unfortunate oarsman sharply in the chest, and deposits him, heels upwards, in the bottom of the boat. "Bob," on the other hand, who is pulling bow, and who, being of a more easy-going temperament, is about half a stroke behind his companion, misses the water with his own, and, between them, they very nearly manage to capsize themselves altogether. Whereupon we consult our watches, and find that it is quite time to return to shore. Not that Checksuit is in the least upset, in any other than a purely physical sense, by his misfortune. His cheery cry of "Ere y'are! Fine fresh crabs! all alive, alive, oh!" comes from under the thwarts, slightly muffled in tone, but as irrepresible as ever. But somehow the suggestion does not seem to add much to the fascination of the scene, and by the time Checksuit and his companion have picked themselves up again we are well on our way back to the landing-place.

And then comes luncheon, and we begin to regret our precipitation. It has not previously occurred to us that this is the last meal our "parti de Gawks" will have in common. Or if we have given the point a thought, it has assuredly not been in any sentimental connection. So when Checksuit, who, in honour of what he terms the melancholily festive occasion, has been imbibing freely of his favourite "cham," suddenly jumps up, and

in the face of the assembled public makes us a lachrymo-comic farewell oration, we are a little more taken aback than we have yet been by any of the social novelties of our progress. As for the two or three hundred other people lunching or breakfasting in the great *salle à manger*, they seem on the whole rather amused than otherwise. Here and there a little party of the old school, who have perhaps frequented the hotel in its older days, and have returned to it unaware of its promotion to Messrs. Gawk's list, exchange little glances of horror, and beckon hastily to grinning waiters for an explanation. When, warmed by Checksuit's eloquence, we pass from prose to poetry, and propound to each other with considerable latitude as to time and key, a choral demand as to claims on memory of "auld acquaintance," perhaps a couple of dozen persons here and there, of more than usually sensitive aural organisation, leave their unfinished meals, and flee precipitately; while one stately old gentleman in silver hair, blue coat, buff waistcoat, and shirt frill, whom I remember to have seen once or twice before, when Dick has got me an order for the "Gallery," sends promptly for his bill and his courier, and transfers himself to another hotel without more ado. But the majority of the company are of course Gawk's Tourists like ourselves, and on the whole Checksuit's oratory is a success. For our part we make our escape just in time. A horrible presentiment flashes across me, as at the first sign of movement on our part, the little monster shouts across the table an eager "Oh, I say, 'old 'ard, miss!" and springs to his feet again with an energy which checks even the "cheers for old Gawk" which follow his first speech. But we are too quick for him. We all know what is coming now, and even Mr. Neville strides to the door at a speed such as Pall Mall has rarely ever known. We are safely in the corridor before Checksuit has even commenced his oration in honour of "the ladies!"

He seems to have drunk a good many healths by the time we all reach the station. The party has not been flattening its noses five minutes against the glass panes of the waiting-room doors, before smash goes one of them; and for some time things look as though the whole troop were about to terminate its excursion by being personally conducted to the Geneva "violon." Anything more magnificent than the wrath of the station dignitaries,



or anything more transcendently autocratic than their most imperial high mightinesses, the station dignitaries themselves, I have never yet seen or even imagined. As for the mere payment which our never-failing shepherd hastens to offer, that is set aside with the most superb disdain. Monsieur must pay, of course; that goes without saying. And monsieur does pay accordingly—and from the price at which the payment is assessed, I should say that glass must be a scarce commodity in Geneva. But do we think that by a mere money payment we are to atone for such an outrage as this? Allons donc!

The bell rings before the wrath of these little Joves of the "Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée" is appeased, and we, who are happily not ranked in the general disgrace, make our way on to the platform. Mr. Neville is an old traveller, and well versed in the little ways of what he calls the "P. L. M.," over whose line he is himself particularly careful never to travel if any possible outlay of time or money can get him to his destination by any other route. So we have requested our shepherd not to retain our seats with the rest, and our shepherd has smiled with the smile of one who also has had his experiences. And sure enough, as we leave the less instructed of our fellow-passengers to rush and scramble for the first choice of seats, and saunter quietly across the platform in the rear of the throng, we find, as he has predicted, every compartment full, and two other passengers besides ourselves, altogether shut out. Shut out, that is to say, from any ordinary carriage. There are empty coupés enough to furnish us with a couple of compartments apiece if we like to pay so many francs apiece extra for the accommodation. And there is a huge empty saloon-carriage, which for a trifling consideration of an additional five or ten pounds will take the whole party. But unless we yield to this gentle pressure it seems likely that we shall be left behind. It is not till the hour of starting is actually past that the necessary carriage is added to the train, and then Mr. Neville smiles and hands us quietly into a compartment, the privacy of which there is now no one left to dispute.

When we return to it from our late supper at Macon, he himself bids us good-night, and retiring to the empty compartment next door, leaves us three ladies to repose in peace.

And so between six and seven next

morning we clank slowly into the great Mazas Station, and are in Paris once more. As we descend, we turn to bid good-bye to our gentle shepherd, for poor Mrs. Crumpelhorne has quite made up her mind to pay for the forfeited tickets of the whole party, rather than face again that horrible passage by way of Newhaven and Dieppe. So we are going to Mr. Neville's own particular little private hotel, and mean to cross the day after to-morrow by the Calais-Douvres. But the poor shepherd is otherwise engaged. The irrepressible Checksuit has been "at it" again. Joseph—as he puts it—doesn't seem to care about being doubled up all night like a two-foot rule, and when our train has stopped this morning at the ticket-platform he has actually been discovered, snoring melodiously, in an empty compartment consecrated to "Dames seules!" There is a very serious look upon the shepherd's face as the erring sheep is marched off between M. le Conducteur and M. le Sous-conducteur to the presence of the awful chef de gare himself.

But the face of that tremendous functionary, as the unabashed delinquent greets him with a gentle prod in the swelling chest, and a friendly "I say, you know, old cock! Look 'ere!" is a sight to see.

#### THE POLITE LETTER-WRITER.

THE attainment of the art of writing appears to be more difficult the farther eastwards we travel, and with the difficulty its importance in the eyes of those ignorant of it increases.

In Asia and Africa, wherever the art is understood, a man having a grievance to state or a favour to ask, instead of making it verbally, invariably presents it in the form of a written petition; such is the faith that exists in the influence of the "lillee piecee paper makee talkee." And it is to satisfy the demand for this species of literature that the race of scribes or public writers has sprung up.

Not that they are confined to the "dark continents," they are well known in southern Europe, the difference being that nearer home they have rubbed against a certain amount of civilisation and consequent education, while farther away they are mostly pedantic, ill-educated fellows, their stock-in-trade a collection of long words, a venerable appearance, and a confidential manner.

The retinue of a rich man is rarely

without one of the class, who also acts as interpreter on official receptions; but there is little to distinguish these more lucky specimens from the public writers in the bazaars, except their more sleek exterior and more copious vocabulary of high-sounding, ill-chosen phrases, of which the following is an example. Happening to be shooting in the north of India, a difficulty in providing food for our numerous servants arose. On enquiry among the villagers we found that a certain rajah lived at some little distance, who was kindly disposed, and who would on application send up to camp some native dealers from whom we should be able to purchase the necessary supplies. So a letter was written to the rajah, and in due course arrived his answer, accompanied by the shopkeeper or "bunya," and the requisite sacks of "atta" or flour:

"I have acknowledge the receipt of your memorandum letter by personal, and I send a bunya for supplying atta to your camp, and keep him as you like for his shop, and propitiously write me for any work which is fit for me, and I have been much matericide to read for your coming at Raipore, you should bring your feet here and I shall be there, but my holiday will be tomorrow morning therefore I can't come to you for intervening. My best respectful compliments to you. Yours sincerely,

"SIRDAR KISHEN SINGH,  
"Benefactor of Raipore."

Amongst my experiences are those of the Police Department in a colony possessing an extremely mixed population—Africans, East Indians, French Creoles, and others; and as a matter of course a vast number of petitions on every subject came under my notice.

Here is one from a young Creole, with his mind on matrimony bent, "for permission to enter into a estate of matrimony with one Miss Marie Elside Tubeau whom he has selected as one of the best girls that can suit him and whose feelings sympathise greatly with his own, the annexed letter is a certificate of the good manners and quality of the young maiden, and thereby applicant hopes to receive a favourable answer, and the approval of his superior."

We will hope that "one of the best girls" has answered the expectations she excited. It is just probable had he read the following appeal that his selection would have been at least delayed, for the Indian Gunesh states that "Upwards six months

ago my lawful wife named Luckea born in India a female immigrant is now being harboured by an European, Tulupson, to whom though many times where she actually lives, and told her to go to her conjugal domicile, she repugnantly refused and still refuses to do so, where she left four children in my custody who are still young and without protection. Under these circumstances I am fain to submit the facts to your notice with hope that you will be so good as to guide me how to proceed with this matter, for I am still a novice in the judicial carrying."

Applications for relief are of course most numerous. Here is one from a personage whose exalted rank should place him above all need; yet he says, heading his letter quaintly enough: "In pursuance of the prophecies of the German monks. SIR,—Would you have any objection to lend me a couple of pounds (£2.00.00)? If not, please send the same through the post. There is a long time since I am unjustly penniless, trying to change my very precarious position but I am unsuccessful up to this moment although persevering daily and wisely as you ought to know. Two pounds (£2.00.00) are not much for you, in a word are not the sea to drink, and will greatly oblige. As it is always and usually done in every civilised and enlightened country you ask or borrow from those who have got money when you have not got any presently, in order to change your position with sense and reason, always honestly and honourably."

This is signed by the "Marquis de Martin, or the Marquis of Brittany [Bretagne], or the true Henri the Fifth of France, or the King Hercules Samson."

The next petitioner appears to have had a portion of his pay stopped in satisfaction for a debt, and after repeated applications for a release, writes that "his creditor is inexorable to the entreaties of a poor black man as your applicant and as I cannot run to his office in consequence of the rigidity of the regulation of this office. And as you are my sole superiors as well as my benefactor and mediator I prostrately lay this my helpless application before you that you will endeavour to instigate his heart in order that he may be exorable to the demand and entreaty of your poor applicant."

I wonder if the poor black man has yet found out, that his word "exorable" is as much wanting in the dictionary as in all probability it is in the heart of the inexorable one.

Then follows an appeal for assistance to the colonel of one of her Majesty's regiments:

"Being grossly insulted in the streets by the Black-guards of this place since nearly twelve years I addressed myself to the police in order to have several detective policemen to put away those wicked men, who told me that there is only a few of them who are all engaged presently, but to apply to you for six men of your regiment and that I will immediately get them. I therefore request that you will be good enough to put at my disposition from this day six of your regimental men; so that to put once for all an immediate stop to such great disorders and disturbances or rather public scandals on the part of those criminal vagrants and ringleaders, which disorders or disturbances are calculated to provoke a rebellion or revolution."

I think the police must have been "pulling the worthy fellow's leg" when they sent him on this wild-goose errand.

But in polite letter-writing there are degrees descending from the more costly and high-flown to those almost illegible, for next applicant states, as well as I can make out: "I have Hereby to this man was a good man sir he can to hact [ask] you one place to gaurd civil constable for work. In this moment he was no employment he was tree childrend him and his wif they was werry poor. I have no riz [rice] in my houses I am verry poor he restings Dartois Street, his come to your majestes police."

The commencement of the following is a very common form of beginning, and forms a stock article with the professional scribe: "After having heard the enconium of your generosity, beneficence, and munificence that has no restrictions whatsoever I cannot refrain from taking the respectuous liberty of submitting an application for the purpose of obtaining a mediation from you. Being poor and stranger in that country having no means to have my daily bread than my labour, and without any protector to forward me in that terrible situation therefore I shall take the liberty of taking you for my protector and which deeds shall return to you by our Lord Jesus: as it is said in the Lord prayer book." This is signed by one "JHARRY (a protestant)."

I cannot remember if I accepted the protectorship for which the man in that "terrible situation" selected me; the chances are that I did not.

A servant writes that since the departure of his master he is "involved in an incessant and merciless misery." In his attempts to procure a situation he fails, owing to his "helplessness and want of protection and recommendation." His thoughts thus fly to me, and of my "incessant generosity and charity towards the pauper;" and he at once becomes "a little infused with hope."

Hope as an infusion is an original idea; what a sale for it an enterprising chemist would have!

Another petitioner, calling himself Samuel, trusts that I will take his application under favourable consideration without "rejectment," on several grounds, finishing by saying that, "at this hour of misery if I am also allowed to add that I and my family we are since yesterday morning without aliments."

Then follows a remarkably mysterious affair, fitted for a transpontine melodrama, the details of which I regret not having ascertained. The "Petit Albert" alluded to is a form of incantation much in vogue with the Africans, who as liberated slaves are resident in our colonies; and from continual practice, has spread from them to classes who should be above such vulgar beliefs.

"I would fain glad you do not misunderstand me at all for not couching my real name down, not that I like mystery but am afraid to play the spy in this present case. I shall leap forthwith over any consideration and let you know. At Reserve Street No 26 in a half-closed, ill-boding house, an Indian Creole, short and tiny, about four feet high is customary since many a months to come in and deal infamously with witchcraft, causing by many a scandalous party whilst he is pocketing the money of poor blinded believers in ghost. He is in fact what the Creole calls 'Petit Albert,' he gets in his possession some bones very likely tore from a human skull, some copy-book in which evocations of the devil is written at length, and some other papers where the names of several Policemen are written; the all locked up in a tin box of an ordinary size painted in red and kept in one of the rooms of this haunting house. The man above mentioned possesses and walks sometimes with a packet of checkered cards, frankincense, flowers, and so on. I think him bearded and twenty-six years old.

"Don't you think, sir, samely as I do that such a shameful profaneter of human

remains ought to be severely punished having done enough of misdoings, it is highly time to the burst out of the bubble. Now I will conclude by a last advice on your acting with prudence in picking your bloodhounds to cast headlong at the misdoer, for he boasts of being sustain up in his rookery by the Police which on my side I understand but a few detectives. Lord leads your way. Truly yours,

"FEALTY."

I don't think anything came of this contribution, probably owing to the difficulty pointed out by the writer in picking my bloodhounds.

Not last among polite letter-writers is John Chinaman, who under the signature of Ah-Ky asks for the following indulgence: "To grant to him in the name of the Chinese Church's Society the permission of celebrating the ceremonies religious in their church which shall begin on the twenty instant to the twenty same month."

I fancy the Chinese Church's Society was John's discreet way of putting gambling and gorging, for in the next extract, as a commentary on the above, we find the writer offering his services as "an efficient detective for the gambling houses kept by Chinamen in violation of the law," and proceeding to state that "large amounts of money every night change hands through the reckless gambling taking place in those houses, and to them alone can be attributed the late sudden insolvencies and flights of several Chinese traders to the great prejudice of the colonys commerce. That in case your petitioner is appointed a detective he shall make it his principal duty to put a stop to those ruinous practices of his countrymen by catching them whenever they give themselves up to gambling."

Signature of AH-WENG.

Poor Ah-ky, what chance can he or the Chinese Church have when Ah-Weng is close behind them!

Mr. Enaud wishes to give a musical party, and asks permission of the police to "make a dancing party with a music composed of one Tamtan, which will be beaten according to the African manner, or Mozambique, and to assemble all his friends and members of that occasion; and the same will take place without annoying the inhabitants aforesaid, and without disturbing the public peace." Fancy the harmony of the "tum-tum" after the African fashion disturbing any neighbourhood—absurd!

Many appeals come in on the grounds

of family ties, as for example a petitioner who is "weighted with six young children the whole incapable of contributing towards their support, and who approaches me trusting that by my philanthropic feeling it will be productive of good."

Then follows a poor fellow with a strange request, saying "he was during three months ill with palsy; whilst ill it is customary amongst Indian Hindoo in case of recovery from illness to make vow:

"That God having been pleased to disafflict petitioner with that illness, petitioner has made a vow—during three years—to play 'tigre,' called in Madras 'poullee,' in thanks to God. That petitioner wishes to play 'tigre' (poullee) not in the centre of the town but in unfrequented streets," and so on.

The game of "tigre"—tiger—consists in a man stripping himself, painting his body to represent the animal, sticking on a preposterous tail which an attendant wags incessantly, and dancing furiously through the streets until exhausted. It is to be hoped that such violent exercise did not bring on a return of the palsy.

The one that follows and which concludes the present collection is too good to be left out. The writer, a private soldier suffering under a grievance, certainly exerts a considerable amount of eloquence in his own behalf.

"HONOURED SIR,—after seven months Detention there seems as much news of removal As their was the first day is there to be any Conclusion to it at all or am I to be kept Hear for a lifetime your Honour must Be a man of a little feeling I am not a piece of stone that has no feelings it Is a sure thing that I have been neglected or this would have been over four months ago. And I think if it was looked into I should Not suffer for other people's neglect supposing I am to be kept for the arrival of news am I to suffer the loss of pay and Service when all should have been over long ago. Why your Honour it would turn the heart of a stone and make it speak telling your Honour the plane truth it was not For being too idol to work that I surrendered No on the contrary some evil disposed person informed on me and I chused to surrender and this is what it has come to and Not an end to it yet I would thank your Honour for a few words I hope of desiceion If there is to be any or am I to be kept here lingering in a half starved sort of way for ever and then no recompence for this is only Rendering me unfit for the service and for myself to."



I should say our friend, who describes himself as "not a piece of stone that has no feeling," was what soldiers call "a bit of a lawyer," and richly deserved to be kept where he was, lingering. At all events, in the interests of our common humanity, let us hope that by this time there "has been an end of it all."

## ALL OR NOTHING.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY,

AUTHOR OF "A HOUSE OF CARDS," "GRIFFITH'S DOUBLES,"  
&c. &c.

### CHAPTER XVI. ENIGMATICAL.

No man, however hard he had otherwise been hit by fate, could have contemplated, in the character of its owner, so fair an estate as that of Bevis without exultation. The place was beautiful and admirably kept; the house was spacious, luxurious, and not oppressively grand; the arrangements in doors and out of doors met with the approval of the new master, and of his more experienced friend. Dunstan found much more to admire in it all than he had previously recognised, and Sir Wilfrid held that the description Dunstan had given of the place was inadequate to its merits and beauties, and that Miss Monroe had a truer sense of the picturesqueness of the park, the venerableness and variety of the trees, the importance and scientific ordering of the gardens and succession houses. Dunstan had not, in his description, made a point of the beautiful expanse of velvet lawn and rich meadows, falling gently to the thickly-wooded horizon, commanded by the terrace on which the windows of the chief rooms opened; and it was Esdaile who told him, as on the following morning they surveyed this noble sweep of land, that the great trees on the lawn had each his respective name; that the mighty oak which spread its branches on the right was called King Alfred, and its fellow on the left was Charlemagne. Dunstan had grown so heartily tired of his own society that he would have hailed with delight the appearance of even a less welcome person than Esdaile, and it was with animation that he had on the preceding evening talked of all they were to see and to do on the morrow. He foresaw that reforms and additions would be required in the department of the stables; neither the admiral nor Mrs. Drummond had known or cared anything at all about horses, so

that it was likely such animals as might have been retained on the establishment would be solely of the kind dear to dowagerhood. This was a topic on which the friends were in thorough harmony; Esdaile was a good judge of horses, and was pleased to find that Dunstan had recovered his spirits sufficiently to discuss the purchase of hunters with befitting eagerness.

The subject was resumed at breakfast—after which meal Dunstan had promised to give Mrs. Manners an interview—and pursued until Esdaile's attention was distracted by a sharp tapping at a window. He looked up, and rose.

"There is Argus," he said; "he has found us out without delay."

"Argus! Oh, a peacock! What a beauty!" said Dunstan, as Esdaile raised the window-sash and scattered bread upon the grass for the gorgeous bird.

"He won't eat from my hand just at first," said Esdaile, "but he will come to that soon. He is very tame."

"How do you know about him, and his ways?"

"Miss Monroe told me. She was in the habit of feeding him every morning, and he would follow her about from window to window, and come to her when she went out on the lawn."

"Let us cultivate him then," said Dunstan. "I like pets, and all the better when they're ready-made; they are less trouble."

He joined Esdaile at the window, and then it was that Esdaile told him the names of the great oak-trees.

"Argus's favourite resort is on one of the lower branches of Charlemagne," he added.

"Miss Monroe must have christened the trees herself," said Dunstan; "there wasn't much fancifulness about Mrs. Drummond. I daresay she had a great liking for the place, though her life must have been an awfully dull one."

"She seems to have more than a liking for it," said Esdaile. "I should say she loved the place dearly, if one is to judge by the accuracy of her description, the minuteness of her observation, and the expression of her face when she is talking of Bevis."

"You must have heard about enough of Bevis before you came here," said Dunstan, whose already uncomfortable feelings with reference to Miss Monroe—feelings which he would have been glad to avow to his friend had he known how—every word of Esdaile's was increasing.

"Not at all. We were all interested in Bevis, and I was particularly glad to learn what I could about the place and the people, because I saw that Miss Monroe was very anxious that the former ways should not be departed from in certain respects, and I even ventured to give her some assurances on that head. I thought I might answer for you."

"Of course, of course," said Dunstan; "I shall be very glad to do anything that is right—I suppose Miss Monroe means about charities and old servants, and matters of that kind. I daresay Mrs. Drummond left some expression of her wishes with her; she would be likely to do that, not trusting me much on any subject, and thinking they would be more binding on me if they came to me from another person."

"Not trusting you much on any subject?" repeated Esdaile. "What an extraordinary fellow you are, Dunstan! Here's the old lady leaving you the whole of her property, and yet you believe she would not credit you with what it is to be hoped is not a very uncommon degree of good feeling. I really cannot make you out, or come at your notion of Mrs. Drummond. It is singularly unlike Miss Monroe's, at all events."

"Did Miss Monroe say much about her?" asked Dunstan.

"Not very much as to quantity, probably because the loss which she feels so deeply is so recent, but a great deal as to meaning; and I gathered from all she said that a strong attachment subsisted between the old lady and herself. No doubt she was not very easy to get on with, for people in general, but Miss Monroe found her way to her heart. But you have put me off what I was saying about your own unaccountable notions."

"Unaccountable or not, I cannot relinquish them. I suppose nothing was said by Miss Monroe to throw any light on the motives that led Mrs. Drummond to make that will?"

"Nothing whatever that would jump with your idea, which is, so far as I can make it out, that a sensible and self-willed woman, who never liked you, who prevented your uncle from leaving you the property to which you were the natural heir, and who went on disliking you just as much as ever to the end of her days, was induced by some powerful motive, about as reasonable as witchcraft, to bequeath Bevis to you. Miss Monroe made but one allusion to the matter, and then she said it was an act of absolute justice."

"You may think me as obstinate and as wrong-headed as you please," rejoined Dunstan, "but I hold to my own opinion. Mrs. Drummond thought no better of me at last than she did at first, and there is something under all this."

"So be it then," said Esdaile, "I shall not dispute the matter with you. Only I should not trouble myself, if I were you, about what may be under such an uncommonly prepossessing surface as this." He waved his hand towards the lawn.

A discreet knock at the door interrupted the dialogue at this point, and Mrs. Manners presented herself.

"I understood that I was to wait on you at ten o'clock, sir," said the housekeeper, looking like a model of propriety and punctuality, and directing a momentary glance at a timepiece which marked the first quarter beyond that hour.

"Certainly, certainly, Mrs. Manners," answered Dunstan, "and I am quite ready to attend to you."

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile lighted a cigar—not without consciousness of a cold displeasure in the gaze of Mrs. Manners, who regarded the act as an inauguration of those "other times" which she must school herself to endure, with an ample reserve of the privilege of lamentation over the good old ones—and stepped out upon the terrace.

Dunstan had a very vague and meagre notion of the sort of business which he should have to discuss with his housekeeper. He remembered that the personage who had formerly filled that responsible post at Bevis, when he was a little boy, had always seemed to him an awful being, of whom those whom he feared were more afraid than he was of them. Mrs. Manners did not look a bit more likely to "stand any nonsense" than her majestic and implacable predecessor. And Dunstan was absurdly conscious that in her presence he felt very much as if he were a little boy again, and quite aware that she knew all about his helplessness and ignorance. He had a happy inspiration; he would begin by a declaration of confidence, and ask to be allowed to take things for granted; this would be a way of escape for him, and a propitiation of her. So he acted upon his inspiration, and having requested Mrs. Manners to be seated he addressed her in the pleasant taking way that had seldom been resisted, except by Mrs. Drummond, and told her that he was entirely unacquainted with the details of an establish-

ment like that of Bevis, and persuaded that under her superintendence they were all managed to perfection. She had filled to the satisfaction of Mrs. Drummond the responsible position she now held, and Captain Dunstan had the greatest pleasure in confirming her in it. Now he hoped Mrs. Manners would thank him and retire; but he had to learn that the good woman's sense of her own duty extended to the making of other people do theirs, if possible, and that she had no notion of letting him off. His confession of ignorance—though she thought it much more becoming and interesting that a gentleman like him should know nothing about the matters which lay within her province—had put Mrs. Manners on her mettle and on her honour.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," said Mrs. Manners, getting off her chair to make a stiff curtsy, and remaining on her feet to signify that she meant business; "but I should not be comfortable unless you knew exactly how things are in the house, and my system had your sanction, as it had that of my former employers."

"Very well, Mrs. Manners," said Dunstan, resignedly, and casting a regretful glance at Esdaile's figure as it vanished behind the spreading branches of Charlemagne; "I am ready to listen to all you have to say to me, if it's any satisfaction to you, but I approve of your system beforehand."

"And now, sir," said Mrs. Manners, when she had imparted to Dunstan such particulars respecting his own household as she thought necessary, "I have only to hand over to you the books Miss Monroe left in my charge, and to take your orders about the rooms."

"What books do you allude to?" asked Dunstan.

Mrs. Manners requested him to accompany her to the library, where she unlocked the cabinet containing the inventories, and pointed them out to him.

"They were all written by Miss Monroe," she said, "at Mrs. Drummond's request. She was entirely in Mrs. Drummond's confidence, and had the whole authority latterly."

This observation gave Dunstan the opportunity for which he had been wishing. He would ask the housekeeper the question he had not liked to put to Esdaile.

"Miss Monroe must have taken a great deal of trouble," he said. "Did she remain in the house by herself after

Mrs. Drummond's death? Had she no friends near?"

"She stayed until your letter came to me; then she packed up and left. She had only been once out of the place before, when she went, I believe, to see the ladies where she came from. As to friends, sir, there never was any company here, and Miss Monroe hadn't the chance of many."

Mrs. Manners eyed her master closely while she answered his questions. She had not forgotten her conviction that he had not acted with civility to Miss Monroe.

"I had no idea there was anyone here," said Dunstan, and his face expressed the vexation with himself that he felt. "I should have consulted Miss Monroe's convenience if I had known. I hope every arrangement was made for her comfort—in the removal, I mean?"

"She had the carriage, sir, if you mean that," answered the housekeeper, "and her things were packed and sent by our people. There were three cases of books, and the piano, and in this—" Mrs. Manners placed one of the inventories on a table at Dunstan's elbow, and opened the thin volume at a page on which several entries were made in a handwriting not Miss Monroe's—"there is a list of the articles which Mrs. Drummond gave to Miss Monroe, made out and signed by Mrs. Drummond herself." Mrs. Manners turned the page at which Dunstan had glanced, and showed Mrs. Drummond's signature with a date appended to it. This date was a little earlier than that of the will.

"Yes, yes, all quite right," said Dunstan, closing the book hastily, "but I mean more than that. Was there anything Miss Monroe would have wished done? This was her home, you know, for a number of years, and she—you must be familiar with her ways, and those of Mrs. Drummond."

"Miss Monroe knew more of my late mistress's ways than I did," responded Mrs. Manners, primly; "she was a very distant lady to all but one. I could not undertake to say anything about her wishes, except as regards the management of the house, and she entirely approved of my system."

"Well, then," said Dunstan, rather disappointed, and very anxious to escape from the system, "if things go on just as usual, I suppose it will be all right."

Mrs. Manners replaced the inventory in the cabinet, and ceremoniously handed the key to Captain Dunstan.

"I am prepared to answer for my own department, that it will be all right, sir. I have only to trouble you farther on one point. Miss Monroe said your instructions were to be taken about the use of the admiral's corridor."

"The admiral's corridor? I don't understand."

"The rooms on the south side, those which were chiefly used by the admiral and Mrs. Drummond. As to whether they should be used or not for the present?"

"Certainly not. There are many more rooms than will be wanted for many a day without meddling with those. Is there anything more, Mrs. Manners?"

"Only this, sir," replied the house-keeper, with a little additional deaureness, as she took something from the pocket of her black-silk apron. "Miss Monroe left this in my charge, with directions that it was to be put into your own hand, according to the wish of Mrs. Drummond."

So saying she held towards Captain Dunstan the small packet resembling a ring-box in size and shape, that she had placed in her cashbox on the day of Miss Monroe's departure from Bevis.

"Mrs. Drummond's wish!" Dunstan repeated, in surprise, as he narrowly inspected the little parcel.

"Yes, sir, so Miss Monroe said."

Dunstan laid the small packet on the table beside him, and so manifestly did not intend to inspect its contents until he should be alone, that Mrs. Manners had no choice but to retire.

When he was alone Dunstan sat looking at the object that had been handed to him by Mrs. Manners, with an unaccountable disturbance in his face. It was a message from the dead. Did it contain any clue to the mystery of his good fortune? The last words that had ever been exchanged between him and Mrs. Drummond had been spoken in this very room; she had been seated where he was seated now; he remembered it quite well, and the cold politeness with which they parted. And here was a message from her, something personal, altogether intentional; sealed with her own seal. He cut the paper round the impressions without breaking them, and found within a little cardboard-box, containing a small quantity of jeweller's cotton, on which lay a key, formed of some metal that looked like silver, and of foreign construction. Dun-

stan removed the cotton, and looked for some scrap of writing in the box; there was nothing of the kind, nor was there any on the inside of the paper in which the box had been wrapped. The message from the dead was absolutely unintelligible. Dunstan examined the key closely, but could not recall to mind that he had ever previously seen it. Then he fell to considering what might be reasonably supposed to be the object or objects under its guard that Mrs. Drummond would probably have been most anxious to have carefully consigned to her successor.

Family jewels, diamonds, perhaps? He had never heard of any belonging to the admiral, and could not remember ever to have seen Mrs. Drummond wear an ornament except a singularly unornamental gold watch and chain. There was no mention of jewels in the papers he had received from Mr. Cleve. Besides, this slight ill-made key was not the kind of custodian to which is confided the keeping of family jewels. Dunstan was just about to send for Mrs. Manners again, that he might ask her whether she recognised the key, and could throw any light on the purpose with which it had been consigned to him, when it struck him that the circumstance would afford him an opportunity for communicating with Miss Monroe.

"She must know," thought Dunstan, "what it means; and if I show her that I am anxious to carry out any wish of Mrs. Drummond's, if only I can find out what it is, it will be the best apology I can offer for having totally forgotten herself."

Dunstan replaced the key in the box, and going out on the terrace, he waved his handkerchief to attract the attention of Esdaile, who was still visible on the far edge of the lawn. Esdaile came quickly towards the house, and re-entered the library by the window.

"You are over so much of your troubles," he said, "and now I suppose we can go to the stables."

"Wait a minute, here's a little puzzle to add to the big one." He showed the key to Esdaile, and told him how he proposed to discover what it meant.

"I always intended to ask you to introduce me at Bury House," he added. "I hope it will not bore you to call there soon."

"Not in the least," answered Sir Wilfrid.